WHIRRAKEE

December 2003 Vol. 24 No. 11

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2003 - 2004

President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
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Junior Vice President	vacant		
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Excursion organiser	vacant		
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
Librarian	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@bendigo.latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members:
Lyn Hamilton, Glenise Moors *pro tem.,* Rob Moors and there are 4-6 vacancies!!

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has two active sub-groups:

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizen Building.

Front Cover:

This mystery picture was taken by a mystery photographer.
All is revealed on page 5.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 24, No. 11, December 2003

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
The last edition caused no problems with the post office – what a relief! There will not be a Whirrakee for two months, so I hope you will have lots of interesting holiday experiences that can be written up for a bumper edition in January/February. Keep sending them in over the break... please. I hope that all our social activities in December (Hall cleaning, Christmas dinner and picnic at Lyel Glen) will be a good opportunity for us to get together and catch up after a busy year. I wish all our members a safe and happy Christmas with family and friends and some great field-natting mixed in.

Annual Spring Cleaning

The annual spring clean of the Hall will be held on Saturday 13th December from 9am.

Please bring any equipment you think will be needed, and some morning tea.

Try this for Christmas.....

Tom Burton found these recipes in 'New Standard Cookery Illustrated' by Elizabeth Craig (1933) (London, Odhams Press).
70 years on, they seem rather odd. One wonders what people will say about our cookbooks in 70 years time??

Under the heading 'The Meat Course' we have:

To Roast a Mallee Hen

Stuff with liver forcemeat or with pork sausage meat. Cover breast with fat bacon. Bake in a moderate oven for about 1 hour or longer if necessary, When almost ready, remove bacon, dredge breast with flour, and baste with butter or bacon fat once or twice until baked brown. Serve with bread sauce, fried breadcrumbs, and watercress salad, flavoured with tarragon vinegar. A small hen is enough for 2 persons.

Grilled Gill Birds

2 gill birds
1 tablespoonful melted butter
1 lemon
salt, pepper and cayenne pepper

Hang birds well before cooking, then clean, wipe, split in halves down the back. Flatten. Brush with butter. Season with salt, pepper and cayenne pepper. Grill slowly, turning two or three times while cooking, until tender. Sprinkle with cayenne pepper and lemon juice. Allow one or a half per person.
Note - gill birds can also be baked and fried or made into a pie.

(Tom thinks gill birds are probably Red Wattle Birds)

Stewed Bandicoot

1 bandicoot
3/4 pint tomato puree
beef stock
1 tablespoonful chopped onion
1 teaspoonful lemon juice
2 oz bacon fat or dripping
1 oz flour
2 oz butter
1 teaspoonful sugar
salt and pepper to taste

Wash and dry bandicoot with a cloth. Joint neatly. Melt bacon fat or dripping in a saucepan. Dip bandicoot joints in flour, seasoned with salt and pepper to taste. Fry till well-browned all over. Drain off the fat. Add onion and enough stock to come to the level of the bandicoot. Cover with a closely fitting lid. Simmer for 1.5 hours.
Meanwhile melt butter in another saucepan. Stir in flour and cook slowly until nutty brown. Stir in tomato puree. When required remove bandicoot to a hot dish. Strain stock and measure off 3/4 pint. Stir into the tomato sauce. Stir till boiling. Season to taste with salt, pepper, sugar and lemon juice. Add bandicoot. Reheat and serve.

Fried Coma

1 Coma
butter, flour, salt, pepper and paprika

Season two or three tablespoonfuls of flour with salt, pepper and paprika to taste. Joint, blanch, dry and dip coma in flour. Melt butter in a frying pan. Fry joints until golden brown all over. Cover and simmer very slowly until tender, tossing, and adding more butter when necessary. When tender, remove joints to a hot serving dish. Stir enough fresh and sour cream into essence in pan to give you sufficient sauce to coat joints in. Serve with fried mushrooms and scalloped potatoes.

(what is a coma?)

Port Adelaide Pie

12 paraquets
6 thin slices pork or beef
salt and pepper
pinch of crushed herbs
4 rashers bacon
1/2 teaspoonful minced parsley
3 hard-boiled eggs
1.2 lb peeled mushrooms if liked

Prepare and truss birds like quails. Line a pie dish with the pork or beef. Place half the birds on top. Pack slices of egg and bits of chopped mushroom between. Sprinkle with parsley, herbs, and salt and pepper to taste as well as a suspicion of grated lemon rind if liked. Dredge lightly with flour. Cover with strips of bacon. Repeat layers and seasonings. Fill dish two-thirds full of water or white stock. Cover with flaky or puff pastry. Bake in hot oven.

Bendigo Tomato Balls

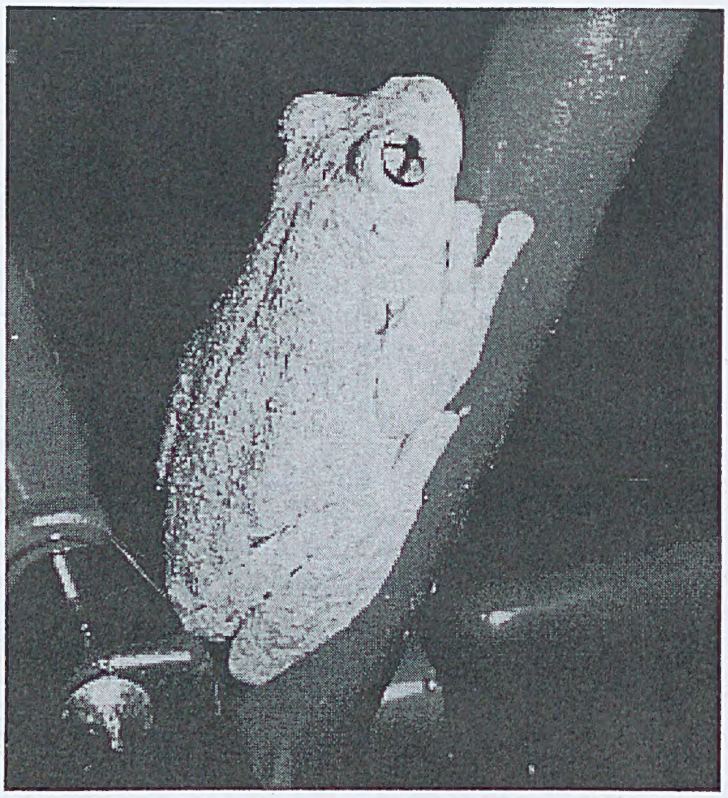
8 oz peeled tomatoes
1 lb potatoes
1 egg yolk
2 heaped tablespoonfuls flour
1 tablespoonful butter
1 teaspoonful sugar
salt and pepper to taste

Slice tomatoes into a saucepan. Add salt, pepper, sugar and butter. Cover and simmer till soft and into a mush. Run through a sieve. Peel and boil potatoes or use cold mashed potatoes. If freshly cooked rub them through a sieve, or put through a ricer. Mix into tomatoes. Stir in flour and beaten egg yolk. Stand for two to three hours or until cool. Shape into small balls with floured hands. Dip in flour. Fry in deep-smoking-hot fat. If liked, egg and crumb after flouring. Serve with grilled bacon, or gammon, or with a mixed grill.

In the few pages that Tom had copied, there are other interesting recipes for Roast Black Swan, Creamed Bandicoot, Roasted Island Blue Goose (Cape Barren Goose?), Casserole of Mallee Hen and Pukaki (Eastern Swamp Hen?).
I think I'll go for the Bendigo Tomato Balls....

....here is the solution to the **mystery picture**. The front cover showed the eye of Peron's Tree Frog,, photographed by Tom Burton on his verandah in late November this year. (I had to put it upside down, otherwise it would have been too obvious!) It is easy to recognise this frog if you can see its toe discs and the cross on the eye.

Tom wrote some notes on this species:
Peron's Tree-frog *Litoria peroni* inhabits northern Victoria through to southern Queensland. It is the larger of the two tree-frogs found in the region, the other being the Brown Tree-frog *L. ewingi.* Peron's Tree-frog varies in colour, usually some shade of grey or grey-brown with scattered small spots of bright green. Its skin is finely warty, so that the frog is not slippery to hold. Its call is distinctive--a loud, penetrating "maniacal cackle" heard from spring to summer.



Australian Naturalists Network
Get Together 2004 - Preliminary notice

by Eddie and Joy Dell
ANN Get-together Co-Ordinators 2004
Phone: 08 92951215
e-mail: dellej@westnet.com.au

The third get-together as foreshadowed in Alice Springs in 2000 and confirmed in Tasmania at the hand-over in 2002 will be hosted by the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in the spirng of 2004. Unfortunately it has not been possible to provide information earlier due to several factors including site inspection of diverse locations within economic distances of the core program venue. You should appreciate that western Australia being such a vast state with ever changing and variable climate conditions it is difficult to predict so far in advance what will be occurring in various diverse regions. It had been intended that the pre-tour embrace the everlasting fields to the north but this has proved to be impossible, logistically and weather wise, considering that the core program should take advantage of the usually better later spring conditions in the south west vegetation province that stretches from near Geraldton to the north to Albany in the south.

The get-together dates are:

- **Pre-tour - Wednesday 22 September to Saturday 25 September**
- **Core program - Saturday 25 September to Monday 4 October, with a rest day on 29 September and the last day on 4 October being a fairly informal event.**
- **Post tour - Tuesday 5 October to Friday 8 October.**

The venue including accommodation for the core program is the Perth international Big 4 Tourist Park, Hale Road Forrestfield 6058.
Arrangements have been made with management for use of the excellent facilities for evening talks etc, but you will need to make your own accommodation arrangements direct with the tourist park.

We are still in the process of costing the various elements of the get-together with a view to having preliminary cost estimates within a couple of months. An early indication of proposed attendance, indicating which of the three events members intend to take part in would assist greatly with all of our planning arrangements.

May all you from across the continent get into the spirit of **"Perth here we come in 2004"**

Plight of Brushtailed Possums in Rosalind Park
by Trish Pilling and Barbara Pelczynska

Editor's Note:
For readers of the 'Bendigo Advertiser' Trish Pilling and Barbara Pelczynska should be well known as avid letter writers, particularly about the possums in Rosalind Park. Here they summarise their story. For a wider range of observations and opinions on this matter, it would be good if other BFNC members could contribute to this debate.

As frequent visitors to Rosalind Park we have made observation of the resident Brush Tailed possums over more than 12 years. We became alarmed when at the end of 2001 the Council placed metal guards and then progressively plastic ones on the exotic trees in the Park. We wrote to the Council complaining about the obvious hardship the guards have posed to the possums. Now there are 98 trees guarded with 177 guards. It became obvious to us that the Council never took the well being and long term survival of the possums into consideration when guards were placed on the trees.

It is true that the exotic trees are in a bad shape in the guarded area of the Park - the Council attributes this to the possums and we to the prolonged drought, neglect the trees suffered over the years and their age.
The topography of Rosalind Park in this particular area is a contributing factor as well. Also during 1999 and 2000 there were excessive path building and other excavations taking place in the Park. The soil was compacted. The exotic trees - elms and oaks - in their natural environment are used to deep fertile soil and plenty of water during spring when the trees produce new foliage after being dormant during winter. The Council even banded conifers and palms the possums do not eat conifers or palms but use them as hiding places.

We would like to refer to a letter, dated 25th June, 2002, our group received from the Council, which states that the Council is forever mindful of the environment in which it undertakes its work in a manner that is respectful at all times to both flora and fauna in sensitive areas such Rosalind Park and that as such, the actions that are being implemented are to balance the needs and minimize the detrimental effect on the possums population - not so - according to our observations the bands have a very detrimental effect on the resident possums as their numbers are definitely declining.

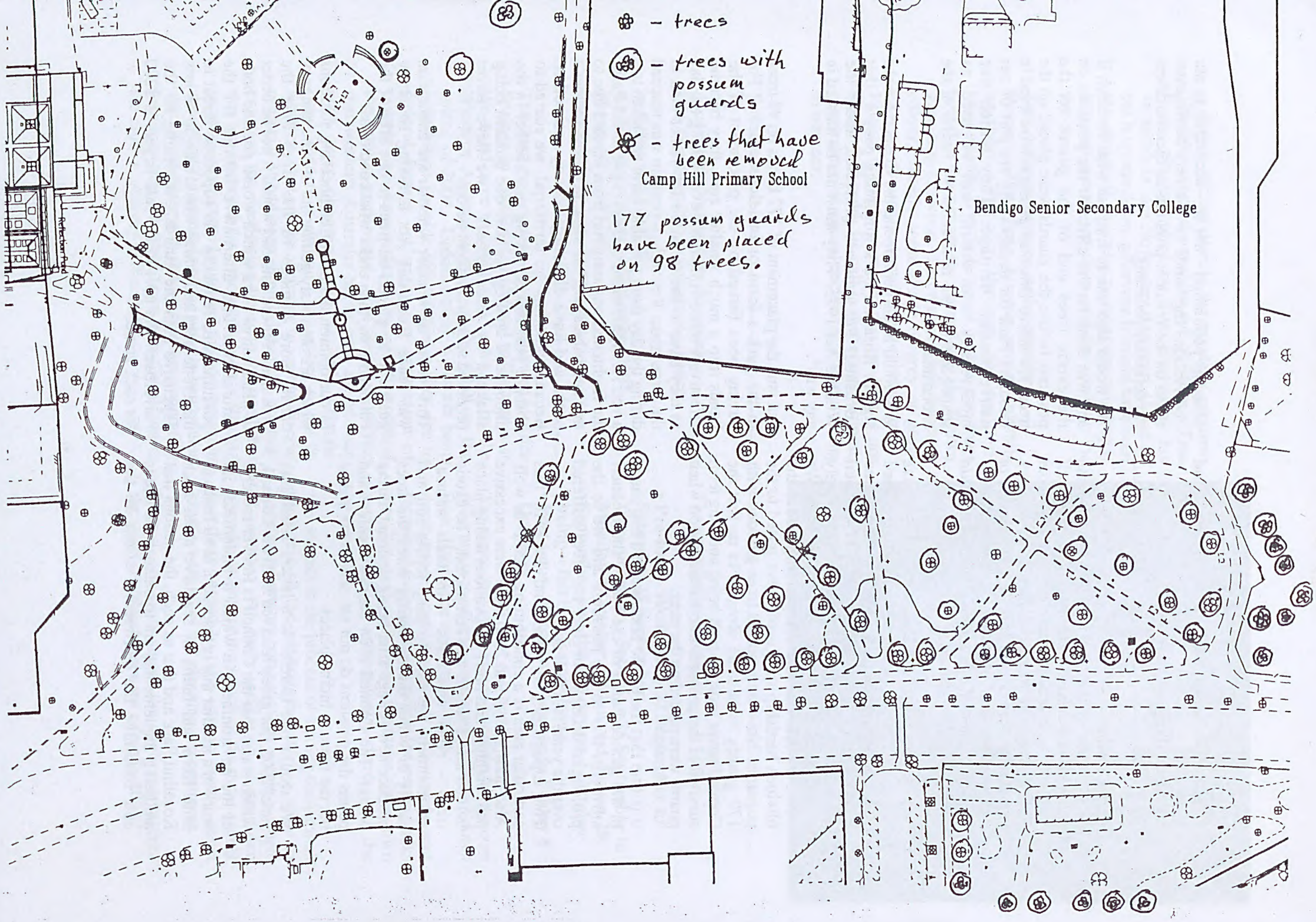
We would also like to find out what research if any was done on the effect of the possums on the exotic trees and of the guards on the possums before the guards were placed on the trees. The native Brushtail possums have lived in Rosalind Park for decades and are part of our native natural heritage. They enrich our biodiversity and should not be used as scapegoats for the decline in the health of the exotic trees.

We would like to commend the Council for the sign in Rosalind Park informing people that "Brushtail Possums are protected under the Wildlife Act 1975. They must not be harmed in any way".

But isn't the placement of 177 bands on 98 trees in the park a form of insidious cruelty? For having been forced by the placement of the bands into a much smaller area, they became effectively more vulnerable even during the day as they have to shelter in bushes rather than in the large trees. Recently a possum was rescued during the day from possible harm and taken to a vet. At night, when there is noise in the Park, the frightened possums run from banded tree to tree and babies become separated from mother's backs and have difficulty finding each other. Because possums are territorial we started to observe possums attacking one another in the unbounded area eg we saw one possum being attacked by three others - we have never observed such an incident before.

This makes us wonder whether am exemption was made from this Act allowing so many guards to be placed on trees in one area of the Park and if so, then under what conditions?

In our opinion the use of engineering solutions which are obviously getting out of hand and may cause more damage to the trees than the possums ever did. Instead would it not be better to plant native flora which would provide both natural diet and alternative habitat for the possums thus reducing the supposed threat to the exotic trees and which would also be far less expensive than the guards. According to 'the Advertiser' the cost to the rate payers is $200 for each guard.


- trees
- trees with possum guards
- trees that have been removed
Camp Hill Primary School
177 possum guards have been placed on 98 trees.
Bendigo Senior Secondary College

The notice also states, "Please do not feed the possums. Human food can be dangerous to possums and cause serious dietary imbalance. Please clean up after yourselves and take home any food scraps". This is very interesting because there is very little of non-human food growing in Rosalind Park suitable for possums to eat.
The fact is that the Brushtail Possums do extremely well in the suburbia because they have adapted to the food available in gardens and live happily under roofs and other available hollows. It is different for the Ringtail Possums as they are more food specific depending more on native plants. That is why there are no Ringtail Possums in Rosalind Park. What the Brushtail Possums like to eat are: insects, variety of leaves, eucalypt trees being the favourite for both leaves and flowers, also feed on native and introduced fruits, bark, buds and flowers. When visiting gardens they will also scavenge on variety of leftovers from meals including meat.
Won't then this signage about feeding possums, if adhered to, effectively subject the Brushtail Possums in Rosalind Park to slow death from starvation?

Christmas cards are currently on sale in Bendigo depicting a Brushtail possum in Rosalind Park wearing a Christmas hat - a beautiful card and one that shows that possums in Rosalind Park are recognized as a valuable tourist attraction. The 'plastic' Park brings shame to Bendigo. When we walk in the Park we meet people from all parts of Australia and different countries. They are all very interested in the possums. In Melbourne a brochure was produced proudly sponsored by Melbourne Hilton Gallery Café overlooking the Fitzroy Gardens. This brochure gave full details about Brushtail and Ringtail possums and the information is to be commended, it is also written in Japanese obviously for tourists. The brochure also states quite frequently that the possums are protected species.

To our horror the numbers of possums we observe in Rosalind Park are declining. It will be a very sad day when we go to the Park and there will be no possums. The old trees will die as well because all old living things eventually die. New trees should have been planted long time ago to replace the old ones in time.

We would like the guards to be taken down now and give the possums back their habitat before it will be too late.

November General Meeting
Speaker Paul Sinclair - "The importance of environmental flows in rivers, streams and wetland areas"

by Sabine Wilkens

Much to my regret, I did not attend this talk. There was such a strong positive reaction to it that I wish I had been able to go. As nobody took notes (all too busy listening). Paul Sinclair has kindly agreed to supply material from which I can summarise what he said.

Paul works for Environment Victoria and, to begin with, he explained about this organisation, then went on to talk about key global and Victorian water challenges and finished the talk by flagging possible solutions.

Who is Environment Victoria, what do they do (and why)?
Environment Victoria was established in 1969 as a non-government, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and restoration of the environment. Its activities include campaigns about healthy rivers, climate change, transport and forests and the organisation is also heavily involved in environmental education programs aimed at children about energy and water use.
To demonstrate the importance of these campaigns it is vital to look at the environmental services provided by ecosystems, entirely free of charge.
For example, healthy rivers
- deliver nutrients to sea to sustain marine food webs
- sustain fisheries
- dilute waste products
- create rich habitats for plants and animals
- maintain soil fertility
- provide water for agriculture,towns and cities
- provide inspirational beauty
- provide recreational opportunities e.g. swimming holes

Global water facts and challenges
Fresh water is in extremely short supply on a global scale. Only 3.5% of the Earth's water budget comes form fresh water (the rest is sea water). Humans have access to only 1% of that budget and they use 54% of the world's available fresh water.

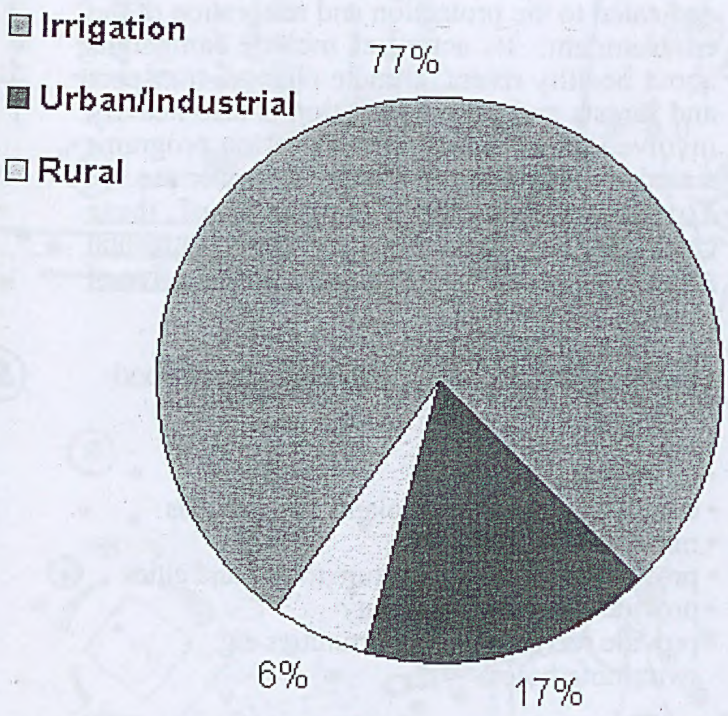
The challenges are the changing nature of supply and demand. Predicted climate change will bring with it changing rain fall pattern, and from projected population growth it is estimated that

humans will use 70% of the available fresh water in 25 years. Already now, one person in six lives without regular access to safe drinking water. It is not hard to imagine that such a situation may eventually lead to water wars. It is a fact also that fresh water life is dying out five times faster than animals that live on land and three times faster than marine mammals.

Victoria's water challenges

Almost 70% of Victoria's rivers are seriously degraded and almost 70% of Victoria's unique native fish are threatened with extinction. For those who heard Peter Menkhorst speak in October, this will sound familiar..... Wetland areas (which, of course do not just serve aquatic life) are also dramatically reduced. Part of the problem comes from over-use of water, so natural flows and flushings are reduced or absent in many bodies of water, see pie graph below:

Proportion of surface water use by consumptive use class (courtesy of Paul Sinclair)



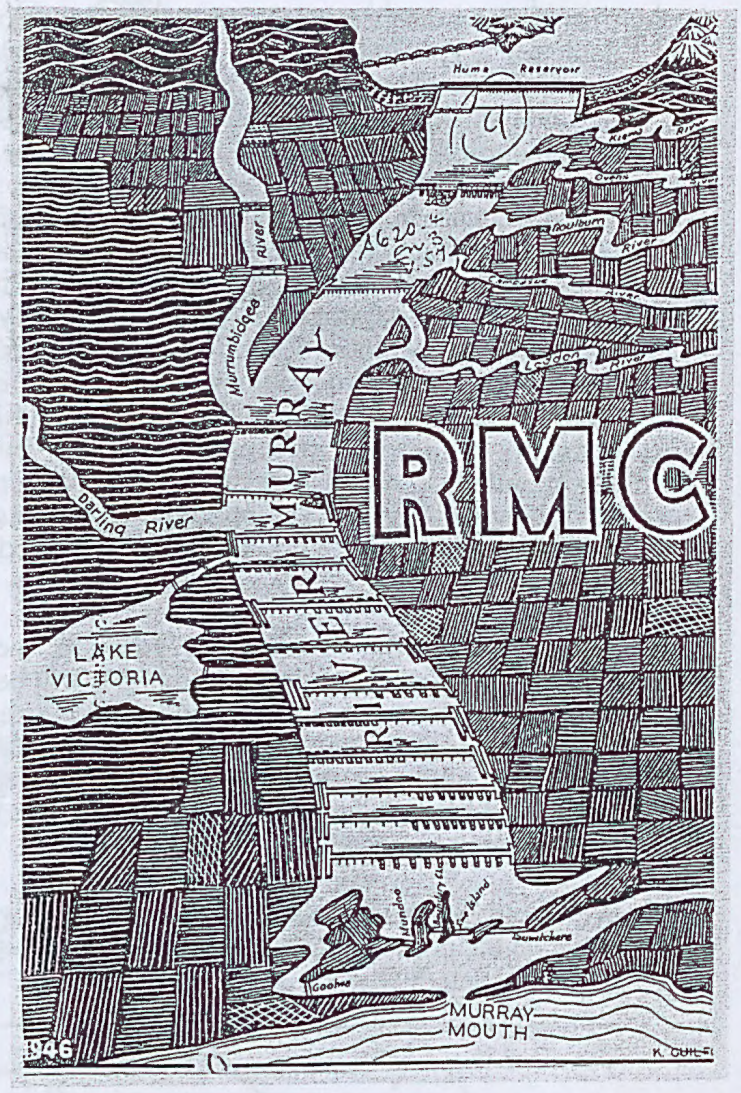
If this graph did not indicate enough of a challenge for Victoria, here are some more:

- Victoria is becoming more urban. Over the last 40 years number of farms were halved.
- there has been a 24% decline in land area farmed since 1940
- predictions are that Australian farms decline 40-60%
- however,the agricultural production is worth 7.6 billion dollars in the year 2000.

How can we protect the long term sustainability of regional Victoria? This is a challenge indeed considering how much water is taken out of the river systems at present (see table below):

	Natural Average Flows (GL)	Current Average Flows (GL)
Murray	12654	4867
Goulburn Campaspe Broken	3667	1361
Loddon	248	119

The picture below *(courtesy of Paul Sinclair)* draws an analogy for the Murray. *Would you be healthy with 75% less blood in your body?*



Reduced river flow has adversely affected the floodplain forests which rely on regular flooding for regeneration. It has also reduced the breeding cycles of fish and birds which evolved under the natural flow regime. The diversion and construction of dams and weirs mean periods of low flow are now more frequent and prolonged.

Solutions

Like us, rivers need to breathe and feed. If they can't, they'll die. Natural flooding does occur rarely these days because of the altered flow regimes. We know now that much of the Murray flood plain will die if the river flow regime is not changed from the present conditions (more or less even flow all year round, as opposed to heavy flows in spring and much reduced flows in summer/autumn).

We also know now that the Murray River's wealth is no longer unlimited as might have been thought 50 years ago. The picture on the right shows two fishermen with their catch of Murray Cod many years ago. In his old age, one of these fishermen, Bub Sebastian, said: *We were too bloody proud, we only wanted cod...now I get crook on myself...because no stream could stand the amount of fish we took. We only had line and rods and we caught them legally, but we came back to Wodonga with a quarter ton of cod. We had the boat full, we had the back of the ute full of bloody cod...it was unlimited.*

Environment Victoria' position is an optimistic one. The Murray River can be restored and the extra allocation of 1500 GL over the next 10-15 years will be a start. The Healthy River campaign's goal is to protect and restore clean water resources and aquatic ecosystems and create a sustainable society. Community support and supporting and building networks is a vital element in this. Other aspects are the making of better laws, policies and economics. These will help

- provide clear and strong legal protection for river health
- create an effective system for managing and resourcing environmental flows
- make decision-making on water transparent and accountable to the Victorian public
- invest monitoring and evaluation systems so we learn from mistakes/successes
- make conservation/restoration an opportunity - not a cost.

Unlimited Wealth from the Murray River? The Murray Cod catch sharply declined in the 1960s and has stayed very low ever since. (Picture courtesy of Paul Sinclair)

Rivers can be and have been restored in the past. When we ask ourselves what sort of environment we want to pass on to the next generation there is really no choice but to act now. People can make day to day, personal choices that will help our rivers, but for those who want to be more involved, they can help the Healthy Rivers campaign by joining Environment Victoria now...

There were many visitors present for Paul's talk, including children. Bill Holsworth thanked the speaker and pointed out how important this topic is for the younger generation as they are the ones who have to keep this movement going and keep putting pressure on the government to improve environmental flows and water quality.

Thanks again to Paul for providing the material for me to use in this write-up.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday, December 10, 6.30pm
Christmas Dinner followed by a talk from Chris Tzaros about 'Birds of the Box-Ironbark Forest'. This talk will be the highlight of the evening and is eagerly awaited by our members. BYO everything, drinks and a salad, casserole or dessert to share. Come early to chat or look at the garden.

Please note: There is no meeting in January

Excursions

Christmas lunch meeting at Jack Ipsen's
Sunday, December 14
Jack is expecting our members again this year for the annual Christmas picnic at his property at Lyel Glen near Redesdale.
Please bring all your food and drink as well as a chair (if you need one). There are plenty interesting things to see before you sit down for lunch.
Please contact a committee member if you need instructions how to get there.

Bird Observers Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. Please confirm with Kerrie Norris (ph 54478017)

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

In 2004:
Wednesday, February 25 7.30pm
Topic - Reporting of summer observations.
All welcome to participate.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Know your frog

The following sites both refer specifically to the Victorian frog fauna: If you intend to go to the fauna group BBQ, it might be good to look at these sites beforehand.

http://www.frogs.org.au/frogs/ is based closely upon the Frogwatch Field guide to Victorian Frogs. It has great information--photos, maps, keys, and pie charts to depict seasonal activity.

http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/collections/showcase.asp takes you to the showcase page at the Museum of Victoria. This site has links to accounts of other Victorian fauna besides frogs, including a great links to the butterflies and reptiles of Victoria. This site has bigger photos of the frogs than the other site, and longer call bites (taken from the Frogwatch tape, with introductions by Murray Littlejohn), but the sound can be slow to load up.